



**Bellevue** Hospital Center  
*Caring for New York Since 1736*



# A Bellevue Timeline

## *Celebrating 275 Years of Caring for New York*



*Our mission is to provide  
the highest quality of care to  
every patient with dignity,  
cultural sensitivity and  
compassion regardless of  
their ability to pay*



**Bellevue Hospital** is the oldest continuously operating hospital in America. We trace our roots back to 1736 when a six-bed infirmary opened on the second floor of the New York City Almshouse. This was forty years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Since its humble beginnings as a haven for the indigent, Bellevue has become a major academic medical institution of international renown. Over the centuries, we served as an incubator for major innovations in public health, medical science and medical education. Often referred to as a national treasure, Bellevue defines the very best traditions of public medicine as a public service vital to the well being of our civil society.

This booklet presents a timeline of important individuals and events in Bellevue's history.





**March 31, 1736** - “Publick Workhouse and House of Correction of the City of New York” opens on the present site of City Hall. A six bed infirmary on the second floor becomes the Almshouse Hospital from which Bellevue traces its roots. Common Council Minutes state that the room is “to be used as an infirmary and for no other use whatsoever.” The first medical officer is Dr. John Van Beuren, a forebear of President Martin Van Buren, the 8th President of the United States. From 1736 to 1806, a visiting physician and a visiting surgeon provide care. In 1801, a salaried officer, Dr. William McIntosh, assumes charge of the medical care as a ‘house’ physician. Another visiting physician is added in 1808. In an 1817 re-organization, the City appoints a salaried house physician and house surgeon (alternately ‘man midwife’) and an unpaid visiting surgeon and visiting physician.

**1750** - First recorded instruction in anatomical dissection.

**1753** - The Common Council pays Dr. Johannes Van Beuren 12 shillings for Almshouse service.

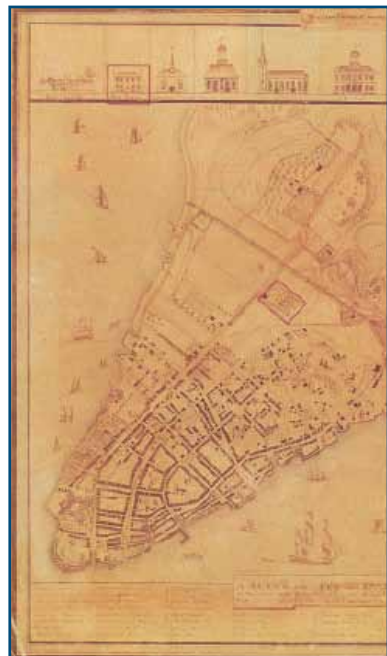
**1765** - Beekman Van Beuren succeeds Johannes as medical officer at the Almshouse.



**1786** - Dr. John Francis Vacher, a French royalist and officer of the Continental Army who served under Washington during the American Revolution, begins work as a visiting physician at Bellevue, a position he holds for seven years. Dr. Vacher is a charter member of the nation's oldest patriotic organization, the Society of the Cincinnati. At his death, he is buried in St. Paul's Church in Lower Manhattan.

**1788** - Mayor James Duane calls out the militia to quell a mob demonstrating against the teaching of human anatomy. Known as the "Doctors Mob Riot," seven rioters are killed, many are wounded and doctors and students are jailed for their protection.

**1794** - Yellow fever and smallpox epidemics occur almost yearly from 1794. In preparation for a feared yellow fever epidemic, the City leases Belle Vue Farm (formerly 'Belle View,' part of the Kips Bay Farm) and constructs a 2-story pest house known as Belle Vue Hospital. The epidemic arrives in early summer, 1795. Belle Vue Hospital is not used between 1796 and 1798. It re-opens in 1798. That year, the land is purchased in fee simple by the City.



**1799** - First maternity ward established by Dr. Valentine Seaman. Dr. Seaman subsequently delivers a series of

lectures on obstetrics to midwives, introduces the cowpox vaccine to NYC, and publishes the first book on midwifery in America.

**1804** - Dr. David Hosack treats Alexander Hamilton after the Burr-Hamilton duel in Weehawken, N.J. Hamilton is mortally wounded. In 1808, Dr. Hosack performs the first successful ligation of an aneurism of the femoral artery.



**1811** - New York City purchases Kips Bay farm and begins construction of a new almshouse and two six-room hospital pavilions (one for men and one for women). Known as the Bellevue Establishment, the facility opens on April 29th, 1816.





**1818** - First hospital requiring an M.D. to pronounce death



**1818** - Dr. Valentine Mott performs the first ligation of an aneurism of the innominate artery and, in 1821, the first ligation of the common carotid and the first operation for osteosarcoma of the lower jaw. An intrepid and innovative surgeon, Dr. Mott was described as having performed more of the great operations than any man who had ever lived.

**1819** - Bellevue physicians assume charge of a new yellow fever hospital in Fort Stevens.

**1819** - New York City University faculty begin to conduct clinical instruction at Bellevue Hospital.

**1825** - A four story hospital for fever and smallpox cases is opened at Bellevue on additional land adjacent to the Bellevue Establishment. Bellevue Hospital is officially named by the Common Council of NYC. In a medical staff reorganization, the office of visiting physician is abolished, and the position of 'resident' physician is created. This arrangement lasts for the next 24 years.

**1832** - Asiatic Cholera epidemic strikes NYC. Within 10 days, 555 cases are admitted to Bellevue. By summer's end, Bellevue treats 2,000 cases: 600 die.

**1837** - Commission appointed by Common Council issues a report critical of conditions at Bellevue.

**1841** - University of the City of New York (NYU) medical school affiliates with Bellevue.

**1847** - NYC struck by the Great Typhus Epidemic: 60-80 victims arrive daily. Eight army tents are set up to treat the victims on Bellevue grounds. Dr. James Rushmore Wood, a great surgeon and skilled politician, forces the Board of Aldermen to investigate the cause of the epidemic.

**1847** - Bellevue Hospital is separated from the Almshouse Authority. A board of visiting physicians and surgeons takes charge and a permanent Medical Board is created. A medical and a surgical division are formed with the lying-in department (maternity) attached to medicine. The death rate is reduced from 30% to 9%.

**1849** - Amphitheatre for clinical teaching opens, and Dr. William Van Beuren, the author of a classic work on genito-urinary diseases, performs a bladder stone surgery as part of the first public clinic.



**1854** - Bellevue's Dr. James Wood, the first physician in NYS to devote himself entirely to the specialty of surgery, fathers a bill passed by the US Congress to legalize the dissection of cadavers for anatomical studies.

**1854** - The first systematic autopsies in New York take place at Bellevue.

**1856** - Dr. Fordyce Barker becomes president of the New York State Medical Society. A professor of midwifery, he attended President Ulysses S. Grant. It was Dr. Barker who introduced the use of the hypodermic syringe in the US.



**1856-1866** - Erection of a larger building on hospital grounds at East 26th Street.

**1857** - Pathology building opens. The second floor houses the Dr. James Rushmore Wood Museum, a remarkable diseased bone collection. Dr. Wood institutes the first systematized series of clinical lectures ever delivered in this country and champions the founding of the Bellevue Hospital Medical College in 1861.

**1860** - Columbia College of Physicians & Surgeons affiliates with Bellevue

**1861** - Bellevue Hospital Medical School incorporates – the first medical college with a direct link to a hospital and a pharmaceutical dispensary. Faculty is appointed and a course on military surgery is offered.



**1861** - Bellevue provides medical care for Union troops. The Ladies Central Relief Committee is organized by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell and chaired by Bellevue doctor, Valentine Mott. This Committee becomes the nucleus of the U.S. Sanitary Commission which would become the Red Cross.

**1861** - Dr. Lewis Albert Sayre becomes the first chairman of Orthopedic Surgery in the US at Bellevue. An expert on spinal disorders, he invented the Sayre's jacket for abnormal curvature of

the spine and a clubfoot shoe that revolutionized the care of that disability. He becomes the president of the American Medical Association in 1880.

**1862** - 'Flint's Murmur' is named for Austin Flint, prominent Bellevue physician and the first authority on the heart. Dr. Flint brought the stethoscope into general use in the US and served as president of the NY Academy of Medicine and of the American Medical Association.

**1864** - Songwriter Stephen Foster dies at Bellevue, penniless at age 37.



**1865** - Two months after graduating from Bellevue Medical College, Dr. Charles Augustus Leale, a Surgeon at the US Army Hospital, is the first doctor to be admitted into the presidential box at Ford's Theatre after John Wilkes Booth shoots President Abraham Lincoln. Dr. Leale's tragic

words soon travelled around the world: "His wound is mortal; it is impossible for him to recover."

**1865** - Bellevue surgeon, Dr. Stephen Smith, conducts the most thorough health survey ever conducted in an American city, resulting in a report referred to as the "Magna Carta" of municipal sanitation.

**1866** - Bellevue physicians are instrumental in developing the New York City sanitary code, the first in the world. It not only contains a comprehensive set of health rules but empowers the Board of Health to enforce them. Bellevue physician and Civil War veteran, Col. Edward B. Dalton, serves as the first sanitary superintendent of the Metropolitan Board of Health.

**1866** - Bellevue opens the first City morgue.

**1867** - Bellevue opens the first outpatient department in the US with a direct link to a hospital: the Bureau of Medical and Surgical Relief for the Out-of-Door Poor.

**1867** - Bellevue physician performs the first cesarean section in US.



**1868** - Bellevue physician Dr. Stephen Smith is named the first Commissioner of Public Health in New York City in the newly reorganized Department of Health.

**1869** - Bellevue physician, Dr. Job Lewis Smith, authors standard textbook on pediatric disease. The textbook is used for the next three decades in all the medical colleges in the US and is found on the shelves of more physicians than any other book. Dr. Smith founds the American Pediatric Society.

**1869** - Bellevue physician and Civil War veteran, Col. Edward B. Dalton, inaugurates the first hospital-based horse and buggy ambulance service in the US at Bellevue.



**1870** - Walter Reed graduates from Bellevue Medical College and, in 1893, is appointed a professor at the US Army Medical School. In 1900, he is appointed head of the US Army Yellow Fever Commission, which postulates and confirms the theory that yellow fever is transmitted by mosquitoes, rather than by direct contact. This insight gives impetus to the new fields of epidemiology and biomedicine, and most immediately allows the resumption and completion of work on the Panama Canal.



**1870** - Dr. Stephen Smith establishes a separate division at Bellevue for the mentally ill.

**1871** - Dr. Stephen Smith undertakes the first national health vaccination campaign. President Cleveland sends Dr. Smith to Paris to represent the US at a world public health conference. In 1879, the President appoints Dr. Smith to the National Board of Health.

**1872** - The Bellevue Ladies Visiting Committee is formed by Mrs. Joseph Hobson and Mrs. William Henry Osborn. This becomes the nucleus of the United Hospital Fund.

**1872** - Bellevue's Dr. Stephen Smith founds the American Public Health Association and becomes its first president.

**1873** - The New York School for Nurses at Bellevue opens – the first US nursing school based on the Florence Nightingale methods of organization.



**1873** - The “Father of American Pediatrics,” Dr. Abraham Jacobi, and Dr. Job Lewis Smith head Bellevue’s pediatric unit, the first Children’s Clinic in the nation.

**1875** - The first six Bellevue-trained nurses receive their diplomas.

**1876** - Dr. Lewis Sayre, the Father of Orthopedic Surgery, performs the first successful operation for hip-joint disease.

**1876** - Bellevue opens the first Emergency Pavilion in a US hospital.

**1878** - Three Bellevue Hospital School of Nursing graduates write the first textbook for nurses, *A Manual of Nursing*. Nurses are allowed to accompany and attend to patients in the operating room.



**1878** - Following an internship at Bellevue Medical College, Dr. William Welch joins the faculty, teaching pathological anatomy and general pathology. While there, he develops the first laboratory course in pathology in America and the first pathological laboratory. Subsequently, Dr. Welch has a storied career at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore as one of the 'Big Four' founding professors of the University, the first dean of the School of Medicine, and

the founder of the School of Hygiene and Public Health -- the first school of public health in the country. In his lifetime, he is referred to as the 'Dean of American Medicine.'

**1879** - Bellevue erects a pavilion for the insane within the hospital grounds, an approach deemed revolutionary at the time.

**1880** - Tiffany & Co. designs the Bellevue nurse pin.



**1882** - Bellevue formalizes as a teaching hospital by assigning the city's medical schools the privilege of designating attending physicians in medicine and surgery.

**1884** - Andrew Carnegie makes his first public gift to Bellevue Medical College for the Carnegie Laboratory -- the nation's first

laboratory established for teaching and investigation of bacteriology and pathology. The directors are Dr. Edward G. Janeway, who becomes a NYC health commissioner, and Dr. Frederick S. Dennis, who reports on the first investigations carried out at the laboratory on the action of micro-organisms on surgical wounds.

**1886** - The Loomis Laboratory opens at the Bellevue Medical College, one of the finest and most complete establishments of its time in the US. The lab is a gift through Dr. Alfred Lebbeus Loomis, an internationally renowned authority on pulmonary disease and professor of medicine from 1860-1895. Dr. Loomis authors many well known textbooks on the diagnosis and practice of medicine and serves as president of state, local and national medical associations.

**1887** - The first hospital appendectomy in the US is performed at Bellevue.

**1888** - Bellevue opens the first nursing school for men.



**1889** - Bellevue physicians, Dr. Hermann Michael Biggs and Dr. Alfred Loomis, are the first to report that tuberculosis is a preventable disease. Dr. Biggs, the first crusader for community public health, writes that ‘no duty of society, acting through its government, is paramount to the obligation to attack the removable cause of disease.’ Dr. Biggs originates the first bacteriological laboratory in the US at Bellevue.

**1892** - Asiatic Cholera appears and is contained by Dr. Hermann Biggs through bacteriological diagnostic techniques.

**1892** - Bellevue establishes a dedicated unit for alcoholics.

**1893** - Bellevue physician, Joseph D. Bryant, is the lead surgeon in a secret operation on President Grover Cleveland for cancer of the jaw, aboard the yacht Oneida, as it sailed in the East River to Long Island Sound. Dr. Bryant became Commissioner of Health of both NYC and NYS and president of the American Medical Association.

**1894** - Dr. William T. Bull performs the first successful operation of the abdomen for a pistol shot wound at Bellevue Hospital.

**1896** - Bellevue hires the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to design a master plan for the Bellevue campus.



**1897** - Bellevue Hospital College builds a new building at East 26th Street & 1st Ave.

**1898** - Bellevue Medical College joins University Medical College and is named University and Bellevue Hospital Medical College.

**1903** - Dr. James Alexander Miller conceives, organizes and develops the Bellevue Chest Service to combat tuberculosis, a disease that ravages NYC. Dr. Miller was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor for his work to control tuberculosis in France. He serves important terms as president of the American College of Physicians and the New York Academy of Medicine.

**1904** - Dr. Menas Gregory is appointed director of the psychiatric division, a position he holds for the next thirty years. He is chiefly responsible for the development of the Bellevue psychiatric ward into a modern hospital for mental ailments.

**1904** - Bellevue Medical School graduate, Dr. William C. Gorgas, begins decade long work at the Panama Canal project to rid the canal

zones of yellow fever. His sanitation efforts reduced the death rate from all diseases among canal workers below that of any American state or city. He is appointed surgeon-general of the US Army in 1914 by President Woodrow Wilson.



**1906** - The Auxiliary to Bellevue is founded by a group of socially conscious women to provide some assistance for the Bellevue Tuberculosis Clinic. At the time, tuberculosis was a major threat to the health of New York City's one million plus population. At the same time a group of philanthropic-minded women form the Convalescent Relief Committee to provide direct enhancement to every patient's well-being, care and convalescence. They hire Miss Mary Wadley, a graduate of the

Bellevue School of Nursing, class of 1885, to organize the first systematic Social Service Department in a US hospital.

**1907** - The Synagogue Committee, the first volunteer project of the newly formed Free Synagogue under the direction of Rabbi Stephen Wise and his wife, Louise, provide translation and social services for Yiddish-speaking patients.

**1908** - The Auxiliary to Bellevue starts a Day Camp on the old ferryboat "Southfield," anchored off the Bellevue Hospital grounds. This makes it possible for patients who are not eligible for sanatorium care to spend their days in the open air.







**1908** - Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus begins yearly performances in the Bellevue courtyard to entertain patients. This ends in 1967 when the balconies are demolished to ready for the construction of a new hospital.

**1910** - William Sydney Porter who wrote under the pseudonym O. Henry dies destitute at Bellevue.

**1911** - Bellevue opens the first ambulatory care cardiac clinic for working adults in the US.

**1912** - First women doctor on Bellevue's staff is appointed, Dr. Catherine R. Kelly.

**1913** - Bellevue opens the first ward for metabolic disorders in the Western Hemisphere.

**1914** - Dr. Hermann Biggs becomes State Medical Officer.

**1915** - Bellevue Medical School graduate, Dr. Joseph Goldberger, identifies poor nutrition as the cause of pellagra.

**1918** - Dr. Charles Norris, the head of Bellevue's Department of Pathology, is appointed the first Chief Medical Examiner of New York City.

**1918** - Bellevue organizes the first Base Hospital to serve US soldiers during WWI. The unit sets sail on the S.S. Olympic and establishes its base in Vichy, France.

**1918** - The Influenza epidemic strikes NYC. Bellevue treats 3,000 cases. The TB boat is converted to a flu hospital. Bellevue Hospital is closed to visitors for the first time in its history.

**1918** - Dr. Ubert Conrad Vincent is the first African American physician to practice medicine at Bellevue. While at Bellevue, Dr. Vincent earned the rank of residential surgeon in charge of Urological Services. He not only broke down racial barriers, he also saved the lives of patients in need and developed a widely used procedure for surgical relief of varicocele known as the Vincent Operation.



**1920** - The psychiatric inpatient service for children opens at Bellevue, pioneering care for children with post-encephalitic behavior disorders. This unit evolves into the first center in the nation to study autistic children and to train child psychiatrists.

**1923** - First child psychiatry inpatient unit in the US.

**1926** - Dr. May Edward Chin is the first African American Woman to graduate from the Bellevue Medical School.



**1931** - Bellevue opens psychiatric clinic of the Court of General Sessions to study the psychiatric, clinical and psychological factors in the make-up of criminals.



**1932** - Dr. David Wechsler joins the Department of Psychiatry and serves as chief psychologist for 25 years. During his tenure, Dr. Wechsler originates a set of verbal and performance tests whose results could be converted into a conventional intelligence quotient or I.Q. The scales include: the Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Scales I and II in 1939 and 1942; the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (1949); the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (1955); and the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (1967).

**1933** - Dr. William Tillet conducts groundbreaking studies

of enzymes involved in blood clotting. His work leads to the development of streptokinase, an anti-clotting agent used to combat heart attacks.

**1933** - Bellevue opens a new eight story psychiatric hospital, known as the most modern facility for investigating and treating mental disorders.

**1935** - Public School 106, the first public school for emotionally disturbed children, opens at Bellevue.

**1936** - Bellevue employs the first use of insulin shock therapy for the treatment of mental illness.

**1937** - Bellevue opens the country's first adolescent inpatient unit.



**1938** - Dr. Paul Zoll completes a residency at Bellevue and later develops the first cardiac pacemaker.

**1939** - The first hospital catastrophe unit in the world is inaugurated at Bellevue.

**1940** - The Convalescent Relief Committee and the Synagogue Committee merge with the Auxiliary to Bellevue.

**1940** - Bellevue dedicates a new administration building which houses Catholic and Protestant chapels and a Jewish synagogue.



**1940** - The first cardio-pulmonary lab in the world opens at Bellevue.

**1942** - The Bellevue Unit, organized to serve American troops during WWI, is re-established and sets up hospitals, known as General Hospital #1, outside of London and Paris.

**1947** - Dr. Howard Rusk, the 'Father of Rehabilitation Medicine,' and Dr. George Deaver establish the first non-military rehabilitation service in a general hospital at Bellevue.



**1949** - Folksinger Huddie William Ledbetter, known as Lead Belly, dies at Bellevue.

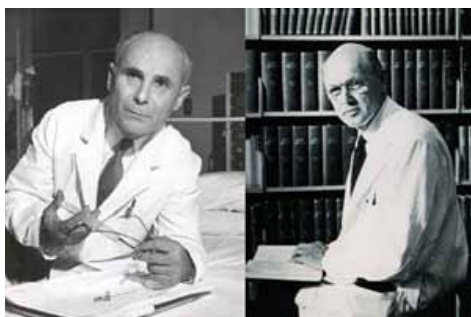
**1949** - A group of dedicated volunteers join together to create a non-profit organization, Children of Bellevue, to fund special programs for children and their families at Bellevue.



**1950** - Bellevue physicians initiate a national test for lead poisoning in children.

**1952** - Bellevue opens the nation's first heart failure clinic.

**1955** - The New York City Regional Poison Center is established as a partnership between Bellevue, the Department of Health, and the NYU School of Medicine.



**1956** - Bellevue physicians, Dr. Dickinson Richards and Dr. André Frédéric Cournand, are awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their pioneering work in the field of cardiac and pulmonary physiology.

Cournand helped develop the technique of cardiac catheterization to chart the interior of the human heart. The method proved to be a simple and reliable way of examining the heart muscle to determine the nature and extent of heart disease and to tell whether a patient could withstand surgery. Dr. Cournand was formerly the Chief Resident of Bellevue's Tuberculosis (Chest) Service and conducted his full-time medical investigations exclusively in the Chest Service. Dr. Richards headed a research lab at Bellevue from 1945 - 1961.

**1960** - NYU Bellevue Medical Center changes its name to NYU Medical Center.

**1960** - Bellevue's director of otolaryngology introduces the first rotating chair in this country for the evaluation of vestibular function in the diagnosis of dizziness, vertigo, or balance problems.

**1962** - The first Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in a NYC public hospital opens at Bellevue.



**1964** - Bellevue is designated as a stand-by hospital for visiting presidents, dignitaries, injured members of the City's uniformed services, and United Nations diplomats.

**1967** - Bellevue physicians perform the first cadaver kidney transplant.



**1966** - A group of private individuals forms a charitable organization, the Bellevue Association, dedicated to continue the tradition of Bellevue to provide responsive, inclusive and cutting-edge healthcare to every person who enters its doors, regardless of ability to pay.

**1968** - New York University becomes Bellevue's sole affiliate.

**1970** - The New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation is formed to succeed the old Department of Hospitals. Bellevue becomes its flagship.

**1971** - The first active immunization of Serum Hepatitis B is developed by Bellevue physicians.

**1972** - The first psychiatric methadone maintenance unit opens at Bellevue.



**1973** - Construction is completed on Bellevue's state of the art 25-story 1.7 million square foot Hospital Building.

**1979** - Dr. William Shaw initiates first extensive use of Microsurgery for Re-implantations.

**1981** - Bellevue is certified as an official heart station for cardiac emergencies.

**1982** - Bellevue is designated as a micro-surgical re-implantation center for the City of New York.



**1983** - Bellevue is officially designated as a level one trauma center, the highest designation of its kind.

**1985** - Bellevue opens the first AIDS program in a NYC public hospital.

**1986** - A US stamp for public hospitals honors Bellevue Hospital Center.

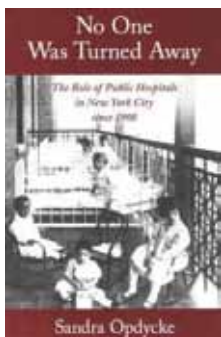


**1988** - Bellevue is recognized by the City's Emergency Medical Services as a head and spinal cord injury center.

**1990** - Bellevue Hospital and NYU establish an accredited residency program in Emergency Medicine.

**1998** - The first MRI in a municipal hospital system is put into use.

**1999** - Bellevue research revolutionizes neonatal intensive care.



**1999** – Historian Sandra Opdycke authors a book on the role of public hospitals in NYC since 1900 entitled, *No One Was Turned Away*. The book features Bellevue and demonstrates the important qualities that make the municipal hospitals in NYC valuable public institutions: inclusiveness, continuity, responsiveness and visibility.

**2000** - Bellevue inaugurates the first Child Protection and Development Center in a US public hospital.

**2005** - Bellevue opens a state-of-the-art ambulatory care building and combined multidisciplinary ICU Unit designed by the internationally renowned architectural firm of Pei Cobb Freed.



**2005** – Lynda D. Curtis, a veteran hospital administrator, is the first African American woman to assume the leadership position of Bellevue. She oversees key strategic initiatives in patient safety, quality and safety performance, improved access and modernization.



**2005** - Bellevue opens first World Trade Center Environmental Health Center for area residents, clean up workers, and students.

**2010** - Bellevue launches the only Comprehensive Children's Psychiatric Emergency Room in New York State.

**2011** - Bellevue opens the City's most advanced Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.



**2011** - Bellevue attending physician, Nirav R. Shah, becomes the 15th New York State Commissioner of Health, the first Indian-American to serve in the post as well as the youngest person named to the post.

**Bellevue continues to embody a tradition of public medicine, public service and extraordinary care.**







**Bellevue**

*Caring for New York since 1736*

